

# Ordering Seeds

12.26.2016

Q: I want to order some seeds for my garden but am confused by some of the information. What is the difference between an Open Pollinated seed and a Hybrid? I am new to gardening, growing my first garden last year, and want to make sure that I don't make mistakes with seed choices.

A: You are wise to ask for more information as choosing the wrong seed can be both disappointing and expensive. For long time gardeners, choosing and ordering seeds is a fairly straightforward activity, but for those who are not quite as experienced it can be rather confusing. There are a lot of different seed companies, all with wonderful and delicious sounding descriptions and photos.

**Hybrid** seeds are often denoted as F1 and are derived from two or more different plants with traits that improve on the best characteristics of the parent plants. Such as better yields or disease resistance. Hybrid Tomato seed descriptions will often include letters following their name such as (AB, V,F,N) showing the disease resistance of that variety. However if you plan to save seeds, savings seeds from hybrids will not guarantee the same plant in future plantings. **Open Pollinated (OP)** seeds are those that will produce plants genetically identical to the parent plant when seeds are saved for future plantings because they will breed "true." **Heirloom** seeds are open pollinated varieties that have been passed down through the generations for 50 years or more, and may have distinctive colors, shapes and flavor. However, heirloom plants may not always have the benefit of resistance to diseases as their hybrid counterparts do.

Both types of these seeds can be listed as organic or treated. **Organic** seeds (O) have been harvested from plants grown organically without the use of synthetic fertilizers or pesticides. **Treated** seeds are seeds that have been coated with something. This can be a fungicide or insecticide to increase a seed's ability to sprout without rotting or being attacked by insects in the soil or in the case of peas or beans it maybe natural beneficial bacteria to encourage better growth. Many

seed companies add color to the treatment to set them apart from untreated seeds. An example of this would be yellow corn seeds appearing pink.

Since tomatoes are usually at the top of the list for seed ordering, the descriptions of various types would include the terms determinate or indeterminate.

**Determinate** tomato varieties have fruits that ripen at the same time and have a bush-like habit. They usually do not need to be supported by staking or caging. Many gardeners have better luck getting a crop from these type of tomatoes as they are not dependent on weather conditions to set fruit.

**Indeterminate** tomato plants on the other hand ripen throughout the growing season and continue to grow right up until the first frost. These do need staking, caging or trellising for support. Many of these varieties may wait until late September to start setting fruit if we have to hot a summer temperatures.

Here are a few other things to keep in mind when choosing seed:

Consider buying seed from one of our local small nurseries as they try to carry seed that does well in our local area.

If ordering from a catalog, order early. You will avoid the disappointment of requesting a sold out item and you may even be rewarded with a free bonus seed packet if you get your order in early. Pictures in seed catalogs can be sometimes deceiving and a variety of plant that you "just have to have" may not be suited to our local climate. Look for terms like "heat tolerant" or "wide adaptability" that will indicate the plant will tolerate the heat and large temperature swings between night and daytime.

If you have friends or neighbors who are gardeners ask them what varieties have done well for them, this will help you avoid ordering something that will not do well in Redding.